

DEP will probe

Toxic dumping evidence sought at development

BY MICHAEL DAILEY
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WHARTON — The state Department of Environmental Protection plans to investigate a West Dewey Avenue site targeted for a warehouse development for the presence of chemicals dumped there decades ago.

A DEP investigator toured the tract, known as the L.E. Carpenter satellite site, with residents Wednesday and determined that their tales of trucks dumping loads of toxic waste into mine pits merited a

second look. DEP spokeswoman Loretta O'Donnell said.

The L.E. Carpenter factory on nearby Main Street closed in 1987 after manufacturing vinyl wall covering for 46 years and now is a federal Superfund site.

The warehouse site might also require cleanup before the new warehouse complex could be built, officials said.

A 1990 DEP report said L.E. Carpenter might have dumped chemicals on part of the property on almost a daily basis in the 1950s and 1960s.

The West Dewey land,

which straddles the Wharton-Rockaway Township border, was listed as a contaminated site on a 1997 list by the DEP. GPU Energy Inc. has a storage facility there, but GPU spokesman Ronald Morano said the company's environmental officials were unaware that the site was so listed.

"It's not on our cleanup list," he said, but he indicated that it might warrant further investigation.

West Essex Manufacturing Corp. of Fairfield has applied to build 292,800 square feet of warehousing, office and light manufacturing space on the 47-acre tract.

At the April 11 planning board meeting, resident Bernie Kelly said he saw trucks

site in Wharton

enter the property years ago and dump loads of green and black chemicals.

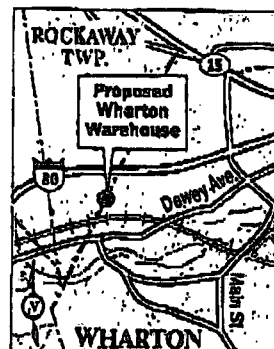
Cheryl Manna, who lives near the site, said that after studying borough records she fears she's living near "the Love Canal of New Jersey," referring to the New York community abandoned two decades ago after homes were found to be contaminated with toxins seeping up from buried waste pits.

But Marc Walker, the project engineer for West Essex, said the former L.E. Carpenter portion of the property is separated from the warehouse area by a small ridge and would not be affected by water runoff from the warehouse side. He said he was unaware of any contamination on the site.

The planning board hearing on the application will resume May 16. Residents plan to make a formal presentation to the board on several issues, including the possibility that the site is contaminated, said William Robinson, who lives across West Dewey from the site.

"I've got three little ones," he said. "I owe it to them to have this investigated."

Mayor Harry Shupe, who also serves on the planning board, said the contamination issue is not within the board's jurisdiction, but is a state and federal matter. If the board gives the application a preliminary approval, Shupe said, it can establish conditions that must be met before final approval is given. They can include a clean bill of health from the DEP, or a plan to get the site cleaned up, if necessary.



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■ Site

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L.E. Carpenter's main site, along North Main Street and the Rockaway River in downtown Wharton, is being cleaned up under the federal Superfund law.

Records from 1994 said chemicals found there include toluene, xylenes, chlorobenzene, chloromethane, acetone, carbon tetrachloride, phenol, cadmium, lead, mercury, arsenic and benzene.

"We're doing this for our children," Manna said. "In 20 years, I

can't have them live not knowing about this."

A 1990 report by Andrew Cyr of the DEP said a pit 40 to 60 feet in diameter and 10 feet deep on the northwest portion of the West Dewey property, part of an old mine site, was suspected of being one of L.E. Carpenter's satellite dumping sites. By then the pit had long been filled in.

Water samples taken from 1987 to 1989 detected levels of tetrachlorethylene ranging up to 8.2 parts per billion, but that could have come from a dry well maintained by the Jersey Central Power & Light Co., which had bought the

parcel, Cyr's report said.

But the report also said a former borough health officer had witnessed L.E. Carpenter dumping waste there, and that a former L.E. Carpenter employee told the DEP that the company had dumped there beginning in 1949.

"Other residents stated they witnessed the dumping of thousands of gallons of waste into and around the pit area, which occurred almost on a daily basis" during the 1950s and 1960s, Cyr wrote.

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